DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 624 FL 800 269

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TITLE Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Families. NCLE Q & A.
INSTITUTION Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited-English-Proficient Adults, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Aug 90
CONTRACT RI89166001
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Educational Objectives; English (Second Language); Family Characteristics; *Family Programs; Instructional Materials; *Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy; *Literacy Education; Multilingualism; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The questions and answers in this document focus on the way that families affect and create the conditions for literacy development and use among family members. The following questions are addressed: (1) What is family literacy? Is it the same as intergenerational literacy? (2) What are the goals of family and intergenerational programs, and what are some models for working toward those goals? (3) What are some of the instructional approaches, methods, and techniques used in family literacy programs? (4) What are some materials and resources that have been developed for family and intergenerational literacy programs? and (5) What are some promising directions for the future? Eighteen references and 10 suggestions for further reading are included. (VWL) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Families

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August 1990

Over the last decade, the view of literacy as a specific set of coding and decoding skills has shifted toward a view of literacy as a set of practices that are shaped by and given meaning through the social context in which they occur. One result is a growing concern for ways in which families affect and create the conditions for literacy development and use.

What Is Family Literacy? Is It the Same as Intergenerational Literacy?

The terms family and intergenerational literacy are recent and are used in different ways by different people. However, they share a common recognition that the relationships between children and adults are important, and that these relationships affect literacy use and development.

The initial thrust for family and intergenerational programming grew from experience and research showing that parents' skills and practices influence the school achievement of their children (e.g., Teale, 1982; Sticht & McDonald, 1989). The terms "intergenerational literacy" and "family literacy" have been used both to describe *what is happening* with literacy in the lives of children and adults and to describe the *kinds of programs* designed to strengthen literacy resources by involving at least two generations.

The primary purpose of family literacy programs has been to support parents in promoting the school achievement of their children. To this end, a number of family literacy program initiatives have emerged such as the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation; the Even Start legislation, which provides funding to projects that help parents who desire more educational skills to make sure their children reach their full potential as learners; and the Family English Literacy Program of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, which provides funding to family literacy programs around the country.

Intergenerational literacy is used in a broader sense; besides parents and children, other adults such as grandparents, neighbors, nonparental guardians, and volunteers who will form new relationships with young people may be involved.

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What Are the Goals of Family and Intergenerational Programs, and What Are Some Models for Working Toward Those Goals?

One set of goals for family and intergenerational programming has been improving the school achievement of children by promoting parental involvement. Programs aimed primarily at increasing parental involvement use activities that encourage or teach parents: 1) to provide a home environment that supports children's learning needs; 2) to volunteer in the schools as aides or in other roles; 3) to monitor children's progress and communicate with school personnel; and 4) to tutor children at home to reinforce work done in school (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986).

A second set of goals in family literacy programs is ". . . to improve skills, attitudes, values and behaviors linked to reading" (Nickse, 1990, p. 5). Models that aim at these goals use a variety of reading activities. Some of these may involve teaching parents to imitate behaviors that occur in the homes of "successful" readers such as reading aloud to children or asking children specific types of questions as the parents read. Parents of young children may practice in adult groups using books that they may then read to their children.

Because experience has shown that nonnative-English-speaking parents are rarely in a position to know more English than their children, and thus to read comfortably to them in their newly developing language, some programs reverse this process and have the children read to their parents. Fortunately, research indicates that this is of equal benefit to children (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982). Innovative programs such as the Navajo Parent Child Reading Program (Viola, Gray, & Murphy, 1986) or the Pajaro Valley program for Latino families (Ada, 1988) aim to foster a love of literature through a variety of activities, such as storytelling in the native language and in English, with discussions taking place in the native language and in English, also.

A third set of goals put forth for some programs is to "increase the social significance of literacy in family life by incorporating community cultural forms and social issues

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into the content of literacy activities" (Auerbach, 1989, p. 17). Models for family and intergenerational literacy that address themselves to these goals will be constituted by activities that "address family and community concerns," that attend to the role of home language and culture, and that include activities to enable adults to develop a critical understanding of schooling to "evaluate and rehearse appropriate responses and develop networks for individual or group advocacy" (Auerbach, 1990, p. 35).

Finally, some programs aim specifically to address the unique difficulties of uprooted families who are making a life in a new setting. In addition to the stresses of voluntary or involuntary resettlement, multilingual families' difficulties are often exacerbated by the differences in the pace of language acquisition for the different generations. Children who have more exposure to English are often placed in a position of translating and solving other problems for parents, reversing traditional roles and creating additional stress for all involved. In programs like Project LEIF (Learning English through Intergenerational Friendship), language and literacy are seen as tools that can be channelled for healing rather than dividing the generations (Weinstein-Shr, 1989).

What Are Some of the Instructional Approaches, Methods and Techniques Used in Family Literacy Programs?

In her overview of family literacy programs, Nickse (1989) creates a framework for classifying programs according to the type of participant (Do both adults and children participate? Is one or the other the intended beneficiary?) and the type of intervention (classes for adults? classes with children and adults together? some combination?). The goals of the program will determine both the participants and the type of intervention that is selected.

Many programs for multilingual families focus on the needs of adults. Those programs that aim primarily at increased parental involvement in schooling often draw on competency-based curricula for adults that are designed specifically for enabling parents to respond to school expectations. Content might include specific lessons on how to read report cards, talk to a teacher, understand the structure of the school, or help with homework. These programs may also include information about American views of health and nutrition or parenting skills, as well as other competencies that have been identified as useful for members of a particular community.

A second approach, also aimed primarily at adults, is the notion of "participatory curriculum" in which the students themselves determine the direction and thus the content of their classes (see Auerbach, 1990). Problem-posing, a technique in which community issues are addressed collaboratively, assumes that the teacher is a facilitator who does not have the answers but can help to identify resources for solutions that students themselves come up with.

Several programs have combined these approaches. The Even Start program in Washington State, for example, begins with an extensive assessment and analysis of learner needs upon which a participatory curriculum is developed; competency-based materials are available if the particular group of learners articulates a desire for that approach (Griffin, 1990). Other programs begin with structured materials and allow these to lead into discussion and exploration of participants' own perspectives and issues. Wherever the emphasis is placed, it seems that programs that are most successful in introducing information about American cultural values and practices are ones that acknowledge and explore native values and practices as an essential part of the curriculum.

What Are Some Materials and Resources That Have Been Developed for Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs?

Curriculum guides for family and intergenerational literacy programs are beginning to emerge from the numerous projects now in operation. While many programs have developed materials to use with their own students, few have had the time or resources to compile these materials into a published format. However, as family and intergenerational literacy programs continue to receive funding over extended periods of time, the volume of documentation will increase. In the interim, a few curricula guides are currently available.

One competency-based curriculum resource is *Home English Literacy for Parents: An ESL Literacy Curriculum* (Terdy & Berkovitz, 1989), developed by the Home English Literacy for Parents Project (H.E.L.P.) at the Northwest Educational Cooperative in Des Plaines, IL. This guide integrates commonly used adult survival competencies, such as paying bills and reporting an emergency by telephone, with school-related competencies, such as parents reading a child's school schedule and filling out forms. Incorporated into every lesson are questions directed to parents to elicit discussion about school, health, and community issues.

One example of a curriculum that focuses on parenting skills for English language learners is *Parenting Curriculum for Language Minority Parents*. This guide for literate and nonliterate adults was developed in 1988 by the Sacramento-Stockton Family English Literacy Project at California State University, Sacramento (Holt, 1988). Units in the book include health, safety, nutrition, citizenship, education, and parenting.

A participatory approach to curriculum development is illustrated by *Making Meaning, Making Change: A Guide to Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL and Family Literacy* (Auerbach, 1990) that was developed by the English Family Literacy Project at the University of Massachusetts. This approach is based on the tenet that a curriculum that reflects the social and cultural realities of the students has the most relevance and is therefore the most motivating to students. In accordance with this perspective, *Making Meaning, Making Change* is intended as a curriculum guide that may be used as a base upon which to build a curriculum that incorporates students' family situations, language and literacy backgrounds, and cultural strengths. *Talking Shop: A Curriculum Sourcebook for Participatory Adult ESL* (Nash, Rhum, McGrail, & Gomez-Sanford, 1989) is a companion volume to *Making Meaning*. A collection of "windows on the

classroom," *Talking Shop* offers accounts of classroom practices from the practitioner's perspective and is divided into three sections. Section one, "Immigrant Experiences," contains units on immigration, sexism, and traffic tickets. Section two, "Mothers and Their Children," is comprised of themes on parents and schools, parents helping their children, and teaching parents and children together. "Redefining Learning and Teaching," section three, includes units on process writing, two-way bilingualism, and group dynamics.

While the work of others can be helpful as a guide, it will be necessary for anyone who is setting up a family or intergenerational literacy program to identify the issues that are of concern to members of their own communities, and to adapt or create materials that will address those particular concerns.

What Are Some Promising Directions for the Future?

The most promising trend is the growing recognition that there is more to family literacy than achievement of children in school. Indeed, a larger, more inclusive picture suggests that it is important to look at children and adults in their families and in their communities as well as in classrooms. Programs that aim to strengthen families and communities while promoting school achievement do not locate "the problem" with parents, but rather see the task as a reciprocal one of enabling parents to understand schools while enabling school personnel to understand and take into account the realities of parents for whom English is not a native language.

Programs that aim to strengthen families and communities while developing literacy resources are likely to be as diverse as the communities they serve. However there are certain characteristics that repeatedly arise in promising programs.

1. The Program Builds on Strengths.

Recent studies have indicated that even "at-risk" families have enormous resources for survival and for supporting their children that largely go unrecognized (e.g., Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). As Ranard (1989) points out, "an approach that views the family--both adults and children--as a combined resource for learning is particularly well suited to the cultural backgrounds and social circumstances of refugee families [who see] the family rather than the individual as the basic unit of society" (p. 1). When the family is viewed as a resource, not as a problem or an obstacle, some approaches become more appropriate than others.

2. Collaboration Is Crucial.

Programs that include both children and adults are strongest when they involve the creative imagination and joint effort of both child and adult educators. Project CLASS in Atlanta, Georgia, is an example of one such effort, where children and adults work separately in their own classes and then join one another for collaboratively planned intergenerational activities. Institutions that traditionally serve youth and those that traditionally serve adults have much to offer and teach one another. Programs that are responsive to community needs must also have the collaboration of ethnic community leaders and adult members in each step of program planning and implementation.

3. Value Is Placed on Traditional Culture as well as on the New Language and Culture.

Children who understand their own background and culture are more likely to have the self-esteem needed to acquire a second language and culture. Adults whose knowledge and wisdom is valued will be in a better position to support their children in school and elsewhere; they will also be in a better position to be helped by their children without having their dignity or their role as parent threatened. Programs that incorporate oral history and exploration of native language and culture as part of the curriculum create a strong base for adding new cultural information and values while strengthening families and communities.

4. Ethnographic Research Is Conducted.

The functions and uses of language and literacy in specific communities are of growing interest to many educational researchers (e.g., Heath, 1983). These can also become the concern of children and adults who can examine their own language and literacy use as part of the educational process. By making explicit what *is*, programs make it possible for individuals to imagine what *might be*.

With recognition of the strengths that multilingual families bring to programs, with collaborative work, with attention to traditional forms of knowledge, and with deliberate investigation of literacy and its uses, it becomes possible to imagine schools that understand and respond to families and communities; families that cooperate with schools toward agreed-upon goals; and generations who find in one another the resources to remember their past and to take on their present and future with confidence and joy.

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